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CHARGE

Delivered to the

694. R. 19.
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CLERGY

OF THE

Archdeaconry of CLEVELAND,

AT THE

VISITATION

Held in the Year MDCCLII.

By FRANCIS BLACKBURNE, M.A.
Archdeacon of Cleveland.

R O R K:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

*S*ome of the Clergy to whom this Discourse was originally addressed, and Others to whom it has been occasionally communicated, having thought that the Publication of it might be of Service to the Cause of Religion, The Author, after some Hæstitation, has given it up to that Service, whatever, by the Blessing of GOD, it may be. The rest of his Concern for these Papers is, that they may appear to be in some Agreement with the Station and Character to which He has been promoted by the Favour of our Most Reverend Metropolitan; whose great Name it would hardly be decent to connect with a Performance every way so inconsiderable, if the Nature of the Author's Obligations to that most honoured Prelate would allow him to suppress his grateful Acknowledgment of them on the first public Occasion given, without incurring the just Reproach of a criminal Insensibility.

A

CHARGE, &c.

REVEREND BRETHREN!

WE are apprized by many prophetic Notices in the New Testament, that the Degrees of Credit and Influence, which the Christian Religion would have in the World, would be very different at different Periods of the Dispensation.

OUR blessed Saviour prepared his Apostles to expect this Variety in the Success of his own and their Ministry very early; and at the same time accounted for it in his Explanation of the Parable of the Sower^a; suggesting the several Occasions and Motives on which many, who had *heard and received the Word with Joy* at the first, would afterwards *fall away*, and be diverted, some from the Practice, and others from the Profession of it.

NOR was this to be the Case with a few, and those inconsiderable Individuals only. The Defection is elsewhere represented as very general.

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^a *Matth. xiii.*

Because, says our Lord, Iniquity shall abound, the Love of Many^b shall wax cold.

ON other Occasions the sincere and persevering Disciples are spoken of as a small and select Number; *Two or three,—A little Flock*, and the like; which Expressions plainly import that the Unbelievers and Disobedient (at least in the Times to which these Discourses refer) would be a large Majority.

THESE Times are fixed by Commentators, with a pretty general Agreement, to the Interval between the Accomplishment of our Saviour's Ministry on Earth, and the Destruction of *Jerusalem*. Some of these Warnings however, seem to look beyond this Period: And, among others, *that implied in the Question, When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find Faith in the Earth?*^c

IF it should be asked, why our Lord was not clear and explicit in a Matter of this Importance; that is to say, clear and explicit in pointing out the exact Times and Occasions of this *falling away*; He answers for himself, that *He had many things to say to his Disciples, but they could not bear them* THEN^d: And *this*, for a very obvious Reason, was as likely to be *one* of those things, as any other whatever.

BUT when he had sent the Comforter,—*The Spirit of Truth*, to guide them into all Truth, and to strengthen them under every discouraging Prospect which concerned either the Course and Progress of the Christian Dispensation in general, or their own Mi-

^b Τῶν πολλῶν, THE MANY. *Matth.* xxiv. 12.

^c *Luke*, xvii. 8. — ^d *Jobn*, xvi. 12.

Ministry in particular, it then became seasonable for *them* to speak of these future Events with more Particularity.

ACCORDINGLY, the Apostles warn the several Churches in which they planted the Gospel, that *grievous Wolves should enter in, not sparing the Flock*: That besides some who were to be *Strangers*, and not of their Communion, others would arise from among themselves, *speaking perverse things*^e: Some would openly cause Divisions and Offences, *contrary to the Doctrine which they had learned*^f; whilst others would privily bring in damnable Heresies^g.

AND as there was to be a Difference in the Characters, so also in the Views of these false Teachers. Some would affect Popularity, and be ambitious to distinguish themselves by drawing away a Number of Disciples after them^h. Others, thro' Covetousness would make Merchandiseⁱ of their Proselytes.

TO these several Purposes would they adapt their Conduct and Instructions; exhibiting, as the Complexion of the Times and Genius of the People gave Occasion, *Signs and lying Wonders*^k; intermixing Fables^l with the Word of Truth; inventing new Doctrines and Commandments, *forbidding to marry*, and *commanding to abstain from Meats*^m; and at length presuming to strike at the very Root of the Christian Faith, *denying the Lord that bought them*ⁿ, and deriding those who looked to have the Promise of his Coming fulfilled^o.

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How

^e Acts, xx. 29, 30.—^f Rom. xvi. 17.—^g 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2. —
^h Acts, xx. 30.—ⁱ 2 Pet. ii. 3.—^k 2 Thess. ii. 9.—^l Tit. i. 14.
^m 1 Tim. iv. 3.—ⁿ 2 Pet. ii. 1.—^o Ibid. iii. 4.

How the Body of the People would be affected and influenced by these Attempts, is also plainly fortetold. Some of them *would not endure sound Doctrine*^p; Others would be perplexed and *intangled in doubtful Questions and Disputations*^q; Many would *turn away their Ears from the Truth, and listen to Fables*^r, with fewer Scruples and less Hesitation; and, following the *pernicious Ways* of their Seducers, would *openly speak evil of the Way of Truth*^s.

It is farther observable, that all this was not to happen at *one* Season or upon *one* Occasion only; some of this Mischief had *crept in*^t during the Ministry of the Apostles themselves; more of it, they prophesy, would arise *after their Departure*^u; some Sorts of Peril and Apostasy would be defer'd to *later Times*^x, and some to the *very last*^y.

FROM these Circumstances laid together it appears, that a continual Succession of false Teachers and false Doctrines is predicted, from the first Establishment of the Christian Church to its final Consummation; and consequently that these Prophecies *belong to us and to our Children* as well as to our *Fathers*; the Apostles intending by them to warn all future Generations, that, in different States of the World, and from different Causes, there would be great Variety in, what one may call, the *Fortunes* of Christianity.

MOST of the Passages here refer'd to, and many others that might be added to them, are indeed,
upon

^p 2 Tim. iv. 3.—^q Rom. xiv. 1.—^r 2 Tim. iv. 4.—^s 2 Pet. ii. 2.
^t Jude, iv.—^u Acts, xx. 29.—^x 1 Tim. iv. 1.—^y 2 Tim. iii. 1.

upon the whole, unpromising to the Success of the Christian Religion; and it is moreover declared that *evil Men and Seducers shall wax worse and worse*²: Yet Reason and Common Sense, as well as the fullest Assurances from Christ and his Apostles, that the Christian Church shall, in none of these Difficulties and Perils, be utterly forsaken^a, lead us to explain these Predictions, by what we know must be, and by what, in fact, has been the Case; namely, that some of these Times and Circumstances would be *worse* than others, and that the Gospel of Christ would have more or less Regard, Reputation and Influence, just as its Adversaries abounded or decreased at different Periods, and in different Places.

It would signify little, *Reverend Brethren*, to have these Warnings left us, or to draw these Observations from them in general Terms, if they might not be applied to the several Occasions and Exigencies of the Christian Church, and to the Occasions and Exigencies of the *present* Times as well as others.

FROM this State of the Case we can do no less than infer, that a great deal must depend, at *all Times*, upon the Care and Conduct of those to whom the Instruction and Oversight of the Church of Christ is committed; and that we in particular, who are called to the *Work of the Ministry*, have just so much of this Evil to answer for, as shall be found to have fallen out, or to have increased, thro' our Sloth and Negligence, or for want of
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² 2 Tim. iii. 13. — ^a Matth. xxiv. 35. Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

applying to it, within our several Provinces, the seasonable Correctives of the Gospel.

It appears, by the Accounts we have in the Apostolical History and Epistles, that all these Defections from the Faith, and this Corruption of Manners, which threatened the Christian Church from Time to Time, were to be brought upon it by the Craft and Affiduity of false Teachers of one Sort or other : And the ordinary Means prescribed to prevent, correct or qualify *their* pernicious Influence, are no other than the contrary Pains and Vigilance of faithful and true Pastors.

WHENEVER these Warnings are given, they are always attended with earnest Exhortations to the Ministry to *take heed to Themselves, and to all the Flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made them Overseers*^b.—*To look diligently lest any Man fail of the Grace of GOD : lest any Root of Bitterness springing up, trouble them, and thereby many be defiled*^c. Which last Text allows me to remark, that Errors in *Doctrinal* Points were not the *only* Objects of this diligent Inspection. The *Moral* Practice and Principles of the People came also within the Charge ; for thus the Apostle goes on, *Lest there be amongst you any Fornicator or profane Person as ESAU*—: that is to say, any Person who, through a libertine or a secular Spirit, shall be found to undervalue or set at nought his Christian Privileges and Obligations.

In Consequence of these Cautions, Ministers are required to be continually upon their Guard ;
and

^b Acts xx. 28. — ^c Heb. xii, 15, 16.

and to adapt their Labours and Circumspection to the several Demands of the Churches under their Care ; that is, to the Nature and Degree of the Evils which either actually do, or are likely to infest them at different Seasons.

EVERY Age since that of the Apostles, has been marked (amongst other Distinctions) with some *religious* Peculiarity ; unfavourable, for the most Part, to the real Interests and happy Progress of true Christianity. What Figures good or bad Teachers have made on these several Occasions, Ecclesiastical History has competently informed us. Nor have we any Method left of making a tolerable Estimate how much the Design of the Gospel has been advanced or retarded at particular Seasons, but by taking an Account of the Conduct, Characters and prevailing Tempers of the Churchmen of those Times, from their contemporary Writers.

As this has been the State of Religion in every other Christian Country under the Sun, it is neither strange nor particularly opprobrious that our own Nation affords no Exception to it. Nor indeed can it be concealed from any one who examines our Church History, that the foregoing Observations have been exemplified among ourselves, by a Series of Facts, which no good Man will contemplate with any Pleasure.

WHAT may be fixed upon for the religious Characteristic of the present Times, would be hard to say. It is certainly not *so much* what it has been in *some* other Periods, *viz.* an inconsiderate

derate Zeal for particular (and often insignificant) Opinions. And it might well be esteemed an hopeful Indication of our present Improvements in religious Knowledge that this troublesome Humor of intemperate Disputation is wearing away, if it were likely to be succeeded by any thing better.

PROBABLY when our Posterity come to collect the Character of the present Age, from so much of our History and Literature as shall go down to them, they may conclude, that being fatigued and surfeited with contending for smaller Matters in Religion, we came at length into a Disregard and Indifference for every thing that has any Connexion with it; not excepting the most important Ends and Uses of the Christian Calling.

So, if I mistake not, are we represented by some of our Contemporaries, who should seem neither to want Opportunities of being well informed, nor Judgment to apply their Information with Pertinence and Propriety.

IN a Proposal for the Employment and Reformation of the Poor, which was before the Public the last Winter^w, it is laid down as an evident Truth, "That the Wickedness of the present
" Poor of our Nation who are *grown up*, is arrived at that enormous Height, that it is too
" late to reclaim *them* from their vicious Habits." Accordingly there is, in this Plan, no Expedient recommended for that Purpose. Instead of that, the Necessity of taking farther Care about these
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^w Exhibited in a single Sheet, intituled, *A Proposal for the Employment of the Poor, and the Amendment of their Morals.*

Miserables, is thought to be superseded by employing and instructing their *Offspring*; whilst the Elder Sort are left "to die away one way or other by Degrees:" that is to say, to die away *in*, and of Course, great Numbers of them, *by* their Wickedness.

How the Consideration of this Matter should affect those to whom the Restraint of Vice and Immorality belongs in a *civil* Capacity, it is not my present Business to remark. This I am sure of, that, if the Fact be really thus, it is enough to give the Heart-ake to every serious Minister of the *Gospel*;—of that *Gospel*, whose blessed and beneficent Author gloried in *preaching it to the Poor*, and appealed to that very Circumstance, as a Token of his Divine Mission.

SHALL we say that this was all Pretence, and that the Gospel of Christ is not calculated to work Repentance in the vicious Poor? Or may it be that Length of Time, and a Number of Years have *abated its natural Force*? Or, lastly, are the present Preachers of the Gospel dispensed with from applying it to this gracious Purpose?

PERMIT me, *Reverend Brethren*, to point out to you one or two of the most obvious of the many Reflexions which arise on the Face of this Account.

FIRST of all it may be demanded, How came the *Poor* into these desperate and incorrigible Circumstances? Every poor Man is a Parishioner *somewhere*: And every Parish is *supposed* to have

a Minister, sufficiently furnished with the ordinary Means of Christian Instruction and Edification, and under a Variety of Obligations faithfully to dispense and apply them. And though it may be allowed that *some* Abatements are to be made in this *Supposition*, on account of those unavoidable Defects which are incident to the most perfect of human Establishments, yet wretched is our Condition indeed, if these Abatements are either so *many*, or so *considerable*, as to oblige us to leave such Numbers of our Flock without the Prospect of *any* Benefit from the Christian Religion. And such, you all know, is really the Case of every abandoned and incorrigible Sinner !

IN the next Place, the Poor are, the very most of them, always in the Dependance, or under the Influence, of People in higher Classes of Life. The Vices of the Times seldom take their Rise, and can never spread very far among the Poor, without some Infection communicated by the Ranks above them. These again derive the Mode from *their* Betters : Nor is it possible to account for a chronical Distemper in the *Extremities*, without tracing it upwards to some of the *nobler Parts*. Here then, so far as this Case concerns the Clergy as Ministers of the Gospel, and accountable for its want of Success in their particular Provinces, the Charge which begins at the *Poor*, ends, you see, among *others* who are not suspected to be out of the Reach of our ordinary Ministrations.

No Part of this Evil, indeed, is brought home to the Clergy in the Paper I have mentioned ; but let us not imagine that *none* of it will be placed to our

our Account. And, to speak my Mind freely, to our Account, I fear, will *some* of it be found to belong.

STRICTLY speaking no Man should be called *remiss*, because no Man can be called to Account for *Remissness*, who, in the Discharge of *any* Office, does all that the Law of his Country requires of him: And, for ought I know, in the Eye of the Law, interpreted by approved Custom, no Body of Men are more likely to be acquitted than the *English* Clergy. But give me leave to remark, that human Laws and popular Customs are but a *Part* of the Rule of an *English* Clergy; where the Rest of it is to be found, I need not mention.

LET us then, if you please, consider this profligate Indifference for Religion as a *new* Incident in the Church, for which we have no especial Directions in our Canon of Discipline. What is to be done? Plainly what the nature of the Case demands, and the Scriptures prescribe; namely, to double our Diligence and Watchfulness; to try St. Paul's Method once more of being *instant in season and out of season; ceasing not to warn every one Night and Day* with that Measure of Zeal and Earnestness, which the Importance of the Business and our own Interest in the Success of it undeniably require.

MANY splenetic things are crudely thrown out against the whole Body of the Clergy, which the Revilers themselves are well convinced not a twentieth Part of them deserve. Of these Insults I

make not the least Account. But, I am afraid, It will not follow, that, because *many* things said or written to our Disadvantage, are false, scandalous or invidious, *every* thing is so. We have sometimes heard of our Faults from some of our Friends, with more Temper and better Designs: And to these if we do not listen, we are hardly just to our Selves.

WITH this previous Intimation, I shall take it for granted that I *do* not, because I am sure no Man should venture any thing in talking upon this Subject in the Words of so complete a Master of it as the incomparable Bishop *Burnet*; who in the *Conclusion* of his last History (which he calls his *Testament*, or his *dying Speech*) has the following Passage:

“ I have lamented, during my whole Life, that
 “ I saw so little true Zeal among our Clergy; I
 “ saw much of it in the Clergy of the Church of
 “ *Rome*, tho’ it is both ill directed and ill con-
 “ ducted: I saw much Zeal likewise throughout
 “ the foreign [Protestant] Churches: The Dis-
 “ senters have a great deal among them: But I
 “ must own, that the main Body of our Clergy
 “ has always appeared dead and lifeless to me;
 “ and instead of animating one another, they seem
 “ rather to lay one another asleep. Without a
 “ visible Alteration in this, you [speaking to the
 “ Clergy of the Church of *England*] will fall un-
 “ der an Universal Contempt, and lose both the
 “ Credit and Fruits of your Ministry.”^b

THIS

^b *History of his own Times*, Vol. II. page 638.

THIS is not the only Admonition of its Kind, which this good Bishop has left behind him. Nor would it be difficult to refer to some very recent Performances where his Observations are repeated, with the Addition of some others not so tenderly expressed. But I forbear; and the Mention I make of this is only for the Sake of Suggesting that these late Writers (some of them fast Friends to the Church of *England* and its Ministers) having taken more than one Occasion to remind us of these Things, it should seem that the *Alteration* spoken of, and recommended as above, is not yet become very *visible*.

IN all this, indeed, the Clergy want not Apologies, nor respectable Advocates to plead them.

PARTICULAR Situations may demand large Allowances; and some Exception there must be to any Rule, be it ever so general. What seems to be most considerable, and is often alledged in Abatement of Men's Expectations from our Function is, "That the disorderly, or even the unedifying Life of a leading Man, with an Estate of four or five hundred Pounds a Year, will effectually defeat the Care and Labours of the most pious and painful Parish-Minister that ever lived."

To this every Man must speak as he has Experience, and I have none of that Kind. Undoubtedly a bad Example joined to a great Fortune must do harm; but hardly *so much* harm as is here suggested. The Influence of a prudent and truly conscientious Clergymen in *any* Situation, cannot well
be

be computed by a few Suppositions. Nor is there a Want of Precedents upon Record, where a steady Conduct, an amiable Temper, and an unwearied Industry in the Discharge of the Ministerial Calling, have been a full Balance for very licentious Examples, even when recommended by the prevailing Weight of much Opulence and Authority. ^a

So far as my own Observation has reached, I should be inclined to apprehend more Danger from some Kinds and Degrees of Compliance with the Humors and Manners of Men of Fortune, into which Churchmen (as well as other Men) may be drawn on different Occasions and Considerations, without foreseeing, (perhaps because without reflecting on) the very inconvenient Consequences to Religion which seldom fail to attend Engagements of that Sort.

FRIVOLOUS Pleasures and Amusements are, more than ever, the Taste of the present Age. We seem to be got into a Way of calling all Kinds and Degrees of them *innocent* which are not openly scandalous or absolutely wicked, the rather, perhaps,

^a This Case is so well explained and illustrated in the *Life of Bernard Gilpin*, lately published by a Gentleman who appears to inherit the Virtue as well as the Name of that venerable Man, that to pass by without referring to it on this fair Occasion given, would look like an Instance of that Indifference with which, as some People complain, all Attempts to recall us to the Principles of our first Reformers are now treated. If indeed we have not departed from these Principles, all Insinuations to the contrary *ought* to be so treated. But in the mean Time it may be worth the while to inquire into the Matter of Fact; of which the Performance I have mentioned, and desire to recommend, may perhaps in some Measure, enable us to judge.

haps, because they *are* frivolous. And to (explain myself by an Instance) few, we may suppose, even of the Clergy, will think of apologizing now a-days for “ spending some Portions of their Time “ suitably to the Taste and Temptations of the “ Country, in *Cards* at home and *Sports* abroad,” as a late Divine, whose elegant Language I am borrowing, has said, with his usual Frankness, he spent a Part of *his*.²

BUT for all that, the Minister of GOD’s Word, and the Man of Pleasure are two different Characters. They may be pretended to, but will never both be found complete in one and the same Man. And whoever affects to reconcile them in the Course of his Practice, will hardly avoid many Inconsistencies, which the poorest Labourer in the Parish may have common Sense enough to remark.

Is nothing then to be indulged in these Articles of Pleasure and Pastime? If any thing, What, and

² The Words are Dr. MIDDLETON’s in a Letter to Mr. WARBURTON. *Miscel. Tracts*, page 471. Some People, I know, wish this ingenious Gentleman had spent *more* of his Time in *Cards* and *Sports*. But others may be met with who do not agree with them. Not that *these* are equally edified by *all* the Productions of this agreeable Writer: But because of *one* eminent Characteristic of our Saviour’s Divine Mission, *viz.* Ὁυτος κεισται—ὅπως ἂν ἀποκαλυφθῶσιν ἐκ πολλῶν καρδιῶν διαλογισμοί, *Luke* ii. 34, 35.—“ Let us, say they, *prove all things* by the “ Gospel of Christ, and reject whatsoever will not abide that Test; “ but let us by no Means be displeased that it is *uttered* or *comes* “ abroad. There are a Multitude of Passages in the New Testament which ought to convince us, that the Occasions given by “ the Gospel of *manifesting the Reasonings of Men’s Hearts*, are at “ present for it’s Honour and Credit, and will be, in the Event, “ for its Interest and Advancement.”

and how much ?—Particular Cases I pretend not to determine for any Man but myself. But, suppose, before *any* Liberties of this Kind are taken, we should each of us ask himself, Is there nothing of the proper and peculiar Business of my Calling left undone ? Is *this* Sort of Recreation as rational and as suitable to my Character, as *some other* which would at once answer all the *good* Ends I can propose by *this*, and Ends that are much better ? May not the Flock of which I have *willingly taken the Oversight*^a suffer, in some Degree, whilst I am pursuing my Pleasures ? And will the Nature and Importance of *these* Avocations afford me a sufficient Justification for myself, or a sufficient Equivalent for the Loss ? Depend upon it, the Time will come when we shall all of us wish to have solid and satisfactory Answers ready for these interesting Questions.

WHAT is here remarked concerning the Diffipation of Pleasures and Diversions, may be also understood of the Incumbrance of Secular Business, equally foreign, for the greater Part, to the Pastoral Vocation. I deny not that Clergymen may be useful in *some* of these Provinces ; but very seldom, I believe, *as* Clergymen. It is, to me at least, a clear Case that the Studies and Maxims which qualifie Men for the Work of the Ministry, and for civil Employments, have very different Tendencies. There is, indeed, a Possibility that *some* Sorts of Men in *some* Situations may be serviceable *both* Ways. But We, my Brethren, should be very sure of this before we engage, if it were only for the Sake of a Remark
of

of St. Paul's, viz. *No Man that warreth intang-
leth himself with the Affairs of this Life, that he
may please him who hath chosen him to be a Soldier.*
Which being recommended to the Notice of Ti-
mothy^b, is brought home to every Minister of the
Gospel, without the Aid of an elaborate Com-
ment.

THE Aim of these Observations is that you
may consider, whether the World will think it
reasonable, that we should lay the Corruption of
our People at the Doors of Men of *other* Views
and *other* Professions, before we have fairly tried
what would be the Consequence of sticking in-
variably, and without any unnecessary Deviations, to
our own? The very best Apology for ourselves
that we can offer either to GOD or Man, is to
make it appear by our Studies, Labours, and Con-
versation, that we *have* done, and still *are* doing
every thing which, in our present Circumstances,
may be done, towards the Amendment and Edifica-
tion of the People committed to our Care. After
which, I, for my Part, cannot but hope we might
depend upon as much Assistance and Encourage-
ment from the better and wiser Sort of the Laity,
as would very considerably check the Contagion of
the rest.

I SINCERELY wish, my reverend and much
esteemed Brethren, and, alas! I can but wish,
that these few Hints may dispose you all seriously
and deeply to reflect, how much the Credit and
Influence of the Christian Religion must depend,

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in

^b 2 Epistle, ii. 4.

in the present State of Things, upon the Instrumentality of a Christian Clergy. The Morals of our People are come to that Pass, that all Men see, in one Light or other, the Necessity for a Reformation. Some Proposals and Expedients for the Purpose, have been offered to the Public, and more, I suppose, may have been thought of. Few of these have yet taken place; nor probably will, with any great Effect, till they are introduced by some previous Endeavours to revive the Spirit and Power of Godliness upon true Christian Principles.

WE may, if we please, amuse ourselves with projecting the Amendment of Mankind by Methods merely political; but as it hath pleased Almighty God to project it before-hand, by the Means of a wise and gracious Dispensation in and by his beloved Son, we may reasonably suspect that He will give but little Success to *any* particular Scheme of Reformation, where the Concurrence and Operation of *his own* are left out of the Account. And *This* being taken in for the Basis, the first Questions will be, How the *religious* Means of edifying our People, which we have had in our Hands so long, have been dispensed and administered? By what they have been obstructed? And whether they are not capable of some farther Improvement? In none of which Inquiries are we of the Clergy unconcerned.

PERHAPS this may appear to be something more than Theory, when it is considered, how little our common People think themselves obliged

to

to be better than their Parish-Minister. If they have as much Religion as their appointed Pastor, in *any* Sense, they are well contented. And when to this we add our farther Experience how *ready* and *willing* People of all Sorts are to disculpate themselves at the Expence of the Clergy; it will help us to conceive how *unready* and *unwilling* Men of other Professions will be, to stir a Foot, or lend a Hand, to redress one Enormity among themselves, whilst they have the least Pretence to apply the Proverb, *Physician heal thyself*.

It is not only *lawful*, but highly *expedient* both for single Persons and collective Bodies to stand upon their Integrity, and to maintain their Reputation when called to their Defence by false and petulant Accusations: And (so much depending upon *their* Estimation) it is more especially *necessary* for the Clergy.

BUT assuredly, my Brethren, this is no Time for us *to lay one another asleep* by mutual Compliments and Congratulations, as if all was orderly and edifying among us. These are but *Presumptions*, which, I am afraid, will have no Currency beyond our own Fraternity, till we can make it appear, either that the Proficiency of our People under our respective Ministers ^{is} is what it should be, or that it falls short through no Fault of ours.

HOWEVER it comes to pass, our common People are amazingly ignorant of the plainest Principles and Obligations of Christianity; which, among other Evils, affords great Temptation to Seducers

of all Kinds to practise upon them ; and to none more than Popish Priests, who are most unhappily dextrous at finding out and plying the weak and wicked Sides of Human Nature ; and commonly bring with them, from the Seminaries abroad, large Portions of that kind of biggotted Zeal in which the worthy Prelate above-cited allows them to abound ; most wretchedly *directed*, indeed, in this Kingdom, to corrupt the best of Religions by Superstition and Idolatry, and to disturb the best of Princes by Sedition and Rebellion.

HAVE we, then, no especial Directions from the Church to instruct the Ignorant ? That can be pretended by none of us who will recollect his Stipulations with the Church, and by what Injunctions these are explained. The Business of *Catechising* is bound upon us both by our Rubrics and Canons. There is indeed, a small Variation in the Directions they give ^b ; and the Directions in *both* might, perhaps, be better expressed : But still, whoever shall think fit to limit his Obligations, under these Rules, to hearing the Church-Catechism repeated by Rote, and that only for five or six *Sundays* in *Lent*, must put a Gloss upon the Text which cannot be justified.

HENCE arises a Surmise that if the single Duty of *Catechising* was but duly and diligently discharged, there would be a greater measure of Christian Knowledge preserved among our inferior People,

^b The Canon says the Minister shall catechise *before*, the Rubric after, the second Lesson at Evening Prayer. There are also some other little Differences between them.

People, and much of this reproachful Ignorance happily and seasonably prevented. If a Man has *any* good Principles to begin with, He will be inclined to doubt, and perhaps to examine, when he meets with any thing that sounds another way; If he has none, where is the Wonder that he picks up the first Nonsense he hears, come from whom it will.

It has indeed been observed, that, considering how much the diligent Parish-Minister is engaged in Duties of another Sort, little can be expected from him in the Article of *Catechising*, unless Parents and Schoolmasters will do *their* Parts too; and there is, no doubt, some Truth in the Observation. But it is to be feared that, except the Minister lead the Way, and shew some Concern, both by his Exhortation and Example, to have the Duty effectually performed, neither Parents nor Schoolmasters (as the World goes now) will form any high or warm Conceptions of the Importance of it, and will be accordingly remiss in the Practice.

If any Doubts arise concerning the *precise Extent* of this or any other of our Ministerial Offices, let the general Sense of our Church determine for us; which on this Occasion is well worth repeating.

“ SEEING ye cannot by any other Means compass so weighty a Work pertaining to the Salvation of Man, but with Doctrine and Exhortation taken out of the Holy Scriptures, and with

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“ a Life agreeable to the same, consider how studious you ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures, and in framing the Manners both of your Selves and of them that especially pertain unto you, according to the Rule of the same Scriptures ; and for this self same Cause how ye ought to forsake and set aside (as much as ye may) all *worldly* Cares and Studies.” ^c

Framing the Manners of our People by *Doctrine and Exhortation taken out of the holy Scriptures*, brings to mind another sort of public Instruction, that of the Pulpit ; of which we have many excellent Patterns in the Discourses of our Divines, especially of the *last* Age. Some wise and good Men have made it a question whether our deviating from *these* (as, it seems, we are thought to have done) is any Proof of our Improvement in this important Branch of the Pastoral Function. Instead of presuming to judge in so critical a Case, I will only-venture to put a Question or two of my own, viz. Whether (the End of Preaching considered, as above laid down) it is worth any Man's while to entertain a common Audience upon any Subject which will not admit of clear and intelligible Illustration from the Word of God—intelligible to the meanest Hearer in the Place ? And whether any Subjects are such, but those plain and practical ones, where the great Stress is laid in the Scriptures ?

I MUST confess I am utterly unable to conceive how *Preaching* should come under the Notion of an

^c Ordination Office for Priests.

an *Art*, not only because *the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*, are disclaimed by *St. Paul*; But upon account of one principal Ingredient which no *Art* can procure. *Preaching* is a *Business* in which no Man will ever have Success, properly so called, who has not both the temporal and eternal Welfare of all Men *sincerely at Heart*; and a Heart so disposed will suffer no Man to content himself with the meagre Credit of an accurate or an entertaining Composition, and much less to lose Sight of the main End of the Ordinance, for the Sake of displaying his Reading, his Logic, or his Oratory.

I MEDDLE not here with one Part of our evil Case, *The Progress of Infidelity*, because I am not sure whether we may not have been too complaisant already in arguing with its Advocates upon Principles (as common to both Parties) which, so far as I could ever discern, *they* could not have come at, but by the Way of our Concessions. Be that as it may; Methinks *the Doctrine of God our Saviour* should not, at this Time of the Day, want so much *proving* by artificial and scientific Reasonings, as *adorning*, by a strict Conformity to it *in all Things*. Bring *this* about if you can; and rest assured that from thenceforward the Principles and Power of mere *Natural Religion* will soon be found too loose and weak for any Purposes either of present or future Felicity.

ONE Word more, *Reverend Brethren*, and I have done. It should never be forgot by *us*, that the great Aim of the Gospel of Christ is to *renew a right Spirit within us*; to dispose the
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Heart of every Man to humble Obedience to the whole Will of GOD; to unspotted Holiness and Integrity in his personal Demeanour; and to a warm, active and disinterested Benevolence for the whole Race of Mankind. In this View, the *Design* and *Compass* of the Christian Religion goes far beyond the *Ends* and *Uses* of fixing the precise Meaning of particular Points of Doctrine, which are not *so* explicit in the written Word, as well as particular Circumstances in religious Worship. Faith in GOD and in *Jesus Christ whom he hath sent*, are indispensibly required in the Gospel, and required in the plainest and most express Terms; but at the same time without any Subtle or Scholastic Definitions. And concerning Modes of Worship, very little more is prescribed, than that all things should be done *decently and in Order*^d, and to the great and important USE of *edifying*; which, as our own Church well observes, may be *different in different Countries*; and why may we not add, with respect to *different Men in the same Country*?

It is too plain to be denied, that our blessed Saviour, and his Apostles after him, left the Terms of Christian Communion remarkably large and comprehensive; and no wonder; The *Dispensation* of Christ was intended to *reform* and to *save*, and by consequence the *Church* of Christ to *take in*, Men of all Countries and of all Ranks and Degrees, with *all* their several Capacities, and with *so many* of their Habits, Qualifications, Distinctions and Peculiarities about them, as were no Obstructions to true Piety and true Repentance.
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^d 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40.

And, perhaps, if nine in every ten of the Objects of religious Difference, which have rent the Church, and thereby stop'd the Progress of the Gospel of Christ, were fairly and candidly examined, they would be found, in reality, of no more Importance to true Christian Faith and Holiness, than so many popular Fashions of different Countries.

THE Spirit which still animates the Popish Church, early began the woful Tyranny of binding human Doctrines and Commandments upon the Consciences of Christian Men; and wherever the *best* of these afford matter of *doubtfull Disputation*, and are insisted on so as to become *grievous* to ingenuous Minds, there we have reason to beware, lest some Portions, more or less, of the *same Spirit* should mix with our Estimation of them, and degrade them into the Rank of *Things which edify not*.

It was a great Disadvantage to the Reformation, that the several Churches of *Europe*, which separated from the *Roman*, and had been, in one common Bondage, galled by her Yoke, should not come into a better Temper one with another, concerning some Particulars of the very same Sort, and of very little more Significance than what they had renounced. And strange beyond Example it is, that some of the best and wisest of the Men who first presided in those Churches, should ever think of placing the Notion of *Schism* in Circumstances so very like those to which they owed their own Christian Liberty.

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THIS Mistake at first separated, and still keeps the Protestant Churches asunder, to the great, but very undeserved Scandal of the true genuine Gospel of Christ. What *should* unite us every serious and reasonable Man clearly sees, and without Difficulty confesses ; even nothing else but our common and avowed Principles of abiding by the written Word of God in all Things. What *will* do it, prejudiced as most Men are by long Use and Habit in favour of their own Systems, is past human Skill to foresee.

In the mean time, Occasions are taken of imputing to the *Clergy* all the Mischiefs that arise from this Disunion ; no doubt from an Observation that Churchmen, of several Denominations, have appeared the first and forwardest in most of the religious Controversies on foot in modern as well as in more early Times : and too often with a Spleen and Bitterness which no Cause will justify ; none, I mean, which is any way connected with our Obligations to that *Lord* who hath enjoined that *his Servants should not strive but be gentle towards all Men.* ^c

THIS evil Spirit is now indeed thought to be dying away, for want of that kindly Nourishment it has met with heretofore ; which, we may hope, will henceforward be better bestowed on a Disposition to examine Theological Subjects with more Calmness and Candor, as well as with more Accuracy.

BUT so it is, that Prejudices which have long stuck to any public Character, are apt to live a great

great while after the Accidents which gave Birth to them have disappeared : And every Churchman may expect that this Reproach of *Clerical Forwardness* will still incounter him, whenever his Zeal and Impatience appear to be more than the Importance of the Cause which blows them up will reasonably account for.

IT is honestly confessed by our Selves that all particular Churches may, and that the most eminent of them have erred ; and no capable Examiner can honestly deny that there are and have been *some* Blemishes in them all : And, what is remarkable, every particular Church discovers these Blemishes of her Neighbour to lye in those very Circumstances which give Occasion to the other to magnify and arm its Self against her. How often has the true Spirit and Power of the Christian Religion *waxed faint* under the Incumbrance of this *heavy Armour* ? How must its Progress *to the Ends of the Earth* have been retarded, by giving to the ruder Part of Mankind no other Idea of it than what was taken from the peculiar Modes and Tenets of some particular Communion, so hard to be understood even sometimes by the Learned themselves ?

THESE Things, *Reverend Brethren*, are worthy of our most serious Consideration. Circumstances in Religion which grew at first out of Occasions and Exigencies no longer in Being, are very apt to *discredit* as well as to *inflame* the Zeal of those who lay too much Stress upon them. And though it is very true that Societies and Communities, as such, are distinguished by nothing

more than their religious Singularities; yet take the Individuals that belong to them out of their occasional Connexions with their respective Bodies, and how little discoverable is the Effect which their speculative Notions and peculiar Conceits have in their moral Demeanour?

THE *Faith working by Love*^f of the Gospel, marks Mankind with more visible and less transient Characters. *By these shall all Men know that we are the Disciples of CHRIST*^g. Make this *Faith* and *Love* the Object of your Study, and the Rule of your Practice, and then contend as earnestly for them as you please.

THE Faith and Duties of the Gospel are so plain in Matters necessary to Salvation, (that is, in the grand Articles of our future Account) that all Men of common Sense, who can be brought to consider them seriously, must have nearly the same Sentiments about them. To what purpose, then, are vehement Contentions about any thing besides? Even none at all, but to lessen our Estimation among the most judicious of our Friends, and the most crafty of our Adversaries, and to prevent, or at least greatly impair our Instrumentality in reconciling Men to God upon the indispensable Terms of Judgment, Mercy, and Faith.

FINALLY, *Reverend Brethren*, let us, as we are exhorted in some excellent Words of our own Church, “continually pray to God the Father, “by the Mediation of our only Saviour JESUS CHRIST,

^f Gal. v. 6.—^g John, xiii. 35.

“CHRIST, for the heavenly Assistance of the
 “HOLY GHOST, that by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures, we may wax *riper* and “*stronger* in our Ministry,” that is to say, that we may have our Dispositions, as well as our Capacities, more and more enlarged and improved by frequent Contemplations on the noble and benevolent Design of Christianity; that we may be every Day more mindfull of, and more affected with the peculiar Obligations of our Calling; and, in Proportion to this Attention and these Impressions, become more solicitous and more discerning how we may best direct our Studies and our Labours to the great End of *saving our Selves and those that hear us*; in Comparison of which all other Ends of our Ministry are less than Nothing.

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